

Realising value: Supporting widening participation students including student ambassadors to reach out and reach in to draw connections between learning and employability.

Claire Mashiter and Ann-Marie Houghton

Abstract

Employability of Higher Education graduates remains a key issue (CBI,2009). Despite a range of specific employability modules introduced into undergraduate courses, it is generally recognised that students from widening participation backgrounds remain at a disadvantage in their progression from Higher Education into employment (Blundell et al., 2005). Universities have an important role in supporting student's entry, progression and transition from study to a work environment and there are concerns that the latter is often neglected.

Student ambassadors assist in the delivery of a range of widening participation activities designed to raise aspiration, awareness and attainment, such as residentials, mentoring, homework clubs and campus visits. Student ambassadors hold a dual role, both as deliverers of the activities and beneficiaries of informal and formal learning, but to what extent is the potential employability value of this experience recognised?

This paper draws on empirical evidence gathered from undergraduate students involved in widening participation activities delivered as part of Lancaster University's Access Agreement and evaluated by the Researching Equity, Access and Participation group. In 2016 we explored the training experiences of student ambassadors and our initial findings suggested that students do not always realise the value of the informal learning and work experience gained through their participation in widening participation activities. From an institutional perspective, successful outreach and in-reach requires widening participation students, including student ambassadors, to become more aware of the inherent benefits of the activities in which they are involved.

The paper reports on a range of widening access activities funded as part of the institutional Access Agreement which are designed to increase awareness, aspiration and employability of widening participation students, whether in their role as volunteers or paid ambassadors on outreach activities. These include: career focused workshops designed to promote reflection and recognition of skills acquired; networking events designed to build confidence and extend social capital networks; leadership initiatives targeted at students with a disability; an international outbound programme providing financial incentives for bursary students; and internships and work experience placements. All of these activities involve opportunities to gain valuable evidence for future CVs and, potentially, enhance students' employability.

Reference

Mashiter, C. & Houghton, A-M. (2017). Realising value: Supporting widening participation students including student ambassadors to reach out and reach in to draw connections between learning and employability. Paper presented to *FACE Conference Concepts of Value and Worth: National and International Perspectives on Widening Access and Participation* 06/2017.

Project:

This paper was based on research undertaken by REAP (Researching Equity, Access and Participation) as part of its evaluation of Lancaster University's Access Agreement Outreach Activities.

For further information including project report [Access Agreement Evaluation Project Outputs](#)

